

HOW TO WRITE GOOD

by Frank L. Visco

My several years in the word game have learnt me several rules:

1. Avoid alliteration. Always.
2. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
3. Avoid cliches like the plague. (They're old hat.)
4. Employ the vernacular.
5. Eschew ampersands & abbreviations, etc.
6. Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are unnecessary.
7. It is wrong to ever split an infinitive.
8. Contractions aren't necessary.
9. Foreign words and phrases are not apropos.
10. One should never generalize.
11. Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know."
12. Comparisons are as bad as cliches.
13. Don't be redundant; don't use more words than necessary; it's highly superfluous.
14. Profanity sucks.
15. Be more or less specific.
16. Understatement is always best.
17. Exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.
18. One-word sentences? Eliminate.
19. Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.
20. The passive voice is to be avoided.
21. Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.
22. Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
23. Who needs rhetorical questions?

ruin break the fair ranks of her forest; no pale, defiled, or furious rivers rend their rude and changeful ways among her rocks. Patiently, eddy by eddy, the clear green streams wind along their well-known beds; and under the dark quietness of the undisturbed pines, there spring up, year by year, such company of joyful flowers as I know not the like of among all the blessings of the earth. It was spring time, too; and all were coming forth in clusters crowded for very love; there was room enough for all, but they crushed their leaves into all manner of strange shapes only to be nearer each other."

But let us now ruin the selected passages, by using Visco's guide concerning "How To Write Good" (and I must also confess as well that I cannot overcome the hilarious hump of the title). I think it would be written thusly:

"Among the hours of a writer's life that he likes, which were more happy than others, is one that passed exactly three years ago at sunset. The location was in the Jura, a place similar to the Alps, whose pine trees and mountains are inspiring. The mountains are not especially imposing though, and rise up and down. The monotonous scene is tender compared to the Alps, with no glaciers, frost, dangerous rock formations, or rapids. Instead, there are quiet streams that run through the forests. The annual flowers here are pretty. As it was spring, they clustered together and formed odd shapes."The Idler Blog

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If people wanted you to write warmly about them, they should've behaved better."

- Anne Lamott

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"There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are." - W. Somerset Maugham

